Verbruggen, M., Dries, N., & Van Laer, K. (2017). Challenging the uniformity myth in career counseling outcome studies: Examining the role of clients' initial career counseling goals. Journal of Career Assessment, 25(1), pp. 159–172.

[1]KU Leuven & [2]Universiteit Hasselt

Published in *Journal of Career Assessment* (2017), 25 (1), pp. 159–172.

Author Note

Marijke Verbruggen, Department of Work and Organisation Studies (WOS), Faculty of Economics and Business (FEB), KU Leuven, Naamsestraat 69, 3000 Leuven, Belgium, marijke.verbruggen@kuleuven.be; Nicky Dries, Department of Work and Organisation Studies (WOS), Faculty of Economics and Business (FEB), KU Leuven, Naamsestraat 69, 3000 Leuven, Belgium, nicky.dries@kuleuven.be; Koen Van Laer, SEIN—Identity, Diversity & Inequality Research, Faculty of Business Economics, Universiteit Hasselt, Martelarenlaan 42, 3500 Hasselt, Belgium, koen.vanlaer@uhasselt.be and Department of Work and Organisation Studies (WOS), Faculty of Economics and Business (FEB), KU Leuven, Naamsestraat 69, 3000 Leuven, Belgium.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Marijke Verbruggen, Department of Work and Organisation Studies (WOS), Faculty of Economics and Business (FEB), KU Leuven, Naamsestraat 69, 3000 Leuven, Belgium. E-mail: marijke.verbruggen@kuleuven.be

Abstract

This study aimed to challenge the "uniformity myth" in career counseling outcome studies—that is, a tendency towards studying career counseling clients as homogenous, implicitly assuming that the same outcomes would be beneficial to all clients. To this end, we examined the role of clients' initial career counseling goals. We hypothesized that a client's career counseling goals would affect (1) which outcomes the client is likely to attain through career counseling and (2) which outcomes he or she would most benefit from (in terms of improved well-being). Hypotheses were tested using data from a three-wave study with Flemish adult career counseling clients. We included six potential career counseling goals and corresponding outcomes: (1) increasing self-awareness, (2) increasing opportunity awareness, (3) making a career decision, (4) finding a new job, (5) improving work-family balance, and (6) improving work relationships. We found that clients were more likely to attain outcomes that matched their initial career counseling goals and less likely to attain other outcomes. In addition, goal attainment (i.e., the attainment of outcomes that match a client's initial goals)—but not non-goal attainment (i.e., the attainment of outcomes that do not correspond to a client's initial goals)—related to clients' subsequent career and life satisfaction. Implications for career counseling research and practice are discussed.

Keywords: career counseling, counseling effectiveness, Social-Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), career counseling goals, well-being, career satisfaction, life satisfaction

Challenging the Uniformity Myth in Career Counseling Outcome Studies: Examining the Role of Clients' Initial Career Counseling Goals

Over the past few decades, many studies, reviews, and meta-analyses have examined the impact of career counseling (e.g., Bernaud, Gaudron & Lemoine, 2006; Brown & Ryan Krane, 2000; Whiston, Sexton & Lasoff, 1998). These studies have fairly conclusively shown that career counseling is generally effective (Whiston et al., 1998). Positive outcomes of career interventions reported in the literature include, but are not limited to, improved self-awareness (e.g., Bernaud et al., 2006), opportunity awareness (e.g., Kidd, Jackson & Hirsch, 2003), and career decisiveness (e.g., Whiston et al., 1998).

In sharp contrast to our knowledge of the overall effectiveness of career counseling, little is known about *differences* in career counseling outcomes across different clients. In fact, in 2003, Heppner and Heppner argued that the literature on career counseling outcomes is subject to what they called a "uniformity myth"—a tendency towards studying career counseling clients as homogenous, assuming that the same type of treatment and the same type of outcomes are beneficial to all clients, regardless of their background, goals, or other critical client attributes (Brown & McPartland, 2005; Heppner & Heppner, 2003). The few studies that have examined differences in career counseling outcomes in relation to client characteristics, such as decision making styles (Tinsely, Tinsley & Rushing, 2002) or problem-solving appraisal (Heppner, Lee, Heppner, McKinnon, Multon & Gysbers, 2004), mainly examined the moderating effect of these characteristics. That is, they hypothesized that career counseling would be more effective for some clients than for others. Yet, they still assumed that a uniform set of outcomes—if attained—would be beneficial to all clients.

However, since clients differ in the goals they bring with them to career counseling

(Brown & McPartland, 2005; Herr, 1997; Watts & Kidd, 1978), effective career counseling may imply attaining different outcomes for different clients. In fact, calls to assess the effectiveness of career counseling by using clients' personal goals have been around for almost forty years (Oliver, 1979; Watts & Kidd, 1978). In addition, the use of individualized outcome criteria to assess counseling effectiveness has been fairly established in other counseling domains such as family counseling and psychotherapy (Donnelly & Carswell, 2002). Within the domain of career counseling, however, the role of clients' goals for understanding counseling effectiveness has—to the best of our knowledge—not been explored to date.

The present article aims to further challenge the uniformity myth in career counseling outcome studies by examining the role of clients' initial career counseling goals. We define career counseling goals as the personally relevant objectives clients aspire to realize through career counseling. Goals are among the core constructs of Social Cognitive Career Theory's interest, choice, performance (SCCT; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994), and work well-being models (Lent & Brown, 2006; 2008) and have been linked to people's efforts, behaviors, performance and well-being (Lent & Brown, 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2001).

In the present study, we propose that clients' initial career counseling goals play a twofold role in career counseling effectiveness. First, we expect that a client's initial career counseling goals affect which outcomes this client is likely to *attain* through career counseling. In particular, we assume that clients are more likely to attain outcomes that are in line with their initial goals and less likely to attain other outcomes through career counseling. Second, we expect that a client's initial career counseling goals affect which outcomes this client will most *benefit from* in terms of improved well-being. In particular, we assume that only the attainment of outcomes that match a client's initial goals—and thus not the attainment of other outcomes

(i.e., non-goals)—will improve the client's career and life satisfaction. We focus on clients' career and life satisfaction because career and life satisfaction are two of the most important indicators of well-being in the work domain, and improving well-being is an important overall aim of career counseling (Lent & Brown, 2008; Verbruggen & Sels, 2010).

Hypotheses were tested using three-wave data collected from Flemish employed adult career counseling clients. We included six potential career counseling goals and corresponding outcomes which have been shown to be relevant for adult counseling clients: (1) increasing self-awareness (e.g., Bernaud et al., 2006;), (2) increasing opportunity awareness (e.g., Kidd et al., 2003), (3) making a career decision (e.g., Bimrose, Barnes, Hughes & Orton, 2004), (4) finding a new job (e.g., Healy, 2001), (5) improving work-family balance (e.g., Bernaud et al., 2006), and (6) improving work relationships (e.g., Bernaud et al., 2006).

Career Counseling Goals and Specific Outcome Attainment

Clients can come to career counseling with a wide variety of goals (Watts & Kidd, 1978). For instance, some clients may want to enhance their opportunity awareness through career counseling, whereas others may aspire to narrow down their options and make a decision (Brown & McPartland, 2005; Galassi, Crace, Martin, James & Wallace, 1992). In fact, the range of potential career counseling goals is expected to increase even more now that policy makers in many countries are taking initiatives to broaden access to career counseling to individuals of all ages at all points in their working life (Herr, 1997; Verbruggen, Dries, & van Vianen, 2013).

Although clients' career counseling goals are a potentially important factor that may predict differential counseling effectiveness, this individual difference variable has been largely overlooked in career counseling outcome studies (Brown & McPartland, 2005). In this study, we expect that clients' goals are likely to affect the outcomes clients attain through career

counseling. In particular, we expect that the more strongly a client aspires to attain a specific outcome, the more likely he or she is to actually attain this outcome through career counseling. A goal is an important cognitive factor which has been shown to steer people's attention and behavior (Lent et al., 1994; Ryan & Deci, 2001). Accordingly, the goals clients aspire to realize through career counseling may affect their attention and behavior during the career counseling sessions. As such, clients' goals may impact how clients process information during the career counseling sessions, which topics they are willing to discuss with their counselor, and which type of interventions they are receptive and open to (Amundson, 1995; Galassi et al., 1992). In addition, clients and counselors often discuss clients' goals during the first counseling phase so that the counseling can be adjusted, if necessary, to better meet clients' goals (Amundson, 1995).

Of course, some clients may—compared to other clients—have more "room for improvement" on a specific outcome dimension and may therefore be more likely to realize that outcome. For instance, clients with low self-awareness at the start of the counseling have more room to improve their self-awareness compared to clients with high self-awareness and are therefore more likely to realize that outcome through career counseling. Similarly, clients who experience high work-family conflict at the start of the counseling have more room for improvement of their work-family balance, which enhances their likelihood to realize that outcome through career counseling. We expect however that because career counseling goals may steer clients' attention and behavior during the counseling sessions, goals will have an impact above and beyond clients' room for improvement on this outcome. We thus expect that among clients with a similar room for improvement on a certain outcome, those who more strongly aspired to realize this outcome are more likely to attain it.

Hypothesis 1: Clients' initial career counseling goals—i.e. the extent to which a client

aspires to attain specific outcomes through career counseling (at T1)— are positively related to clients' attainment of the corresponding outcomes at the end of the counseling (at T2) above and beyond clients' room for improvement on those outcome dimensions.

Goal and Non-Goal Attainment and Career and Life Satisfaction

Next, we expect that not all attained outcomes will be equally beneficial to all clients. In particular, we expect that clients will benefit more from attaining outcomes that match their initial goals than from attaining other outcomes (i.e., non-goals). We therefore distinguish between two types of outcome attainment: the attainment of outcomes that match a client's initial career counseling goals—which we label "goal attainment"—and the attainment of outcomes that do not match a client's initial goals—which we label "non-goal attainment". We expect that goal attainment will contribute to clients' subsequent career and life satisfaction, whereas non-goal attainment will not. This is in line with the assumption made in the social cognitive model of work well-being (Lent & Brown, 2006, 2008) that successfully obtaining one's goals is likely to affect one's satisfaction.

We expect a direct impact of goal attainment on clients' subsequent career satisfaction. Career satisfaction refers to an individual's overall evaluation of his or her unfolding career experience (Heslin, 2005). Since attaining one's initial career counseling goals can be regarded as a positive career-related experience, it seems reasonable that goal attainment would promote career satisfaction directly. In addition, a client's career counseling goals are likely to be issues that this client values in his or her career and therefore, addressing these issues may improve this client's career satisfaction (Irving & Montes, 2009). Outcomes that were not aspired to initially, on the other hand, are likely to be of lower career priority and therefore, attaining them may not necessarily result in more career satisfaction. We therefore predict the following:

Hypothesis 2: Goal attainment, but not non-goal attainment (at T2), will be positively and directly related to clients' career satisfaction (at T3).

We expect that goal attainment also relates to clients' subsequent life satisfaction, although we expect this to be an indirect relationship running through career satisfaction. Life satisfaction has been described as people's global evaluations of their unfolding life (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). Empirical research has shown that there is a substantial correlation between career and life satisfaction (Lounsbury, Loveland, Sundstrom, Gibson, Drost, & Hamrick, 2003). However, there is no agreement on the causal nature of this relationship (Lent & Brown, 2008). Whereas some argue that career satisfaction impacts life satisfaction—that people' s satisfaction in the work domain extends into their non-work life spheres (e.g. Lounsbury et al., 2003)—others posit that life satisfaction impacts career satisfaction, implying that people's overall satisfaction with their lives tends to "spill over" into more specific life domains (Lent & Brown, 2008). However, when people are confronted with substantial career issues, such as job loss or a career transition, it is generally expected that the career sphere impacts the life sphere rather than vice versa (Abele & Spurk, 2009). Because this is likely the case for most clients seeking career counseling, we posit that for career counseling clients, career satisfaction will affect their life satisfaction.

Hypothesis 3: Goal attainment, but not non-goal attainment (at T2), will be positively but indirectly related to clients' life satisfaction through career satisfaction (at T3).

Method

Career Counseling in Flanders

The study was conducted in Flanders, the Dutch-speaking region of Belgium, which represents a specific—and particularly interesting—context for conducting career counseling

research. Since January 2005, the Flemish government has subsidized qualified external career centers for counseling adult employees. To qualify for subsidy, career centers need to have a quality certificate and guarantee confidentiality and impartiality. At the time of the study, the government limited subsidies to career counseling comprising at least six hours of individual face-to-face counseling, hence excluding pure telephone, internet, and group counseling. In 2013, the government changed the regulations slightly, now subsidizing both individual and group counseling of at least four hours.

Career counseling interventions are partly standardized across career centers. All interventions start with an intake interview, in which the counselor provides information about the counseling procedure and learns about the main career counseling goals of the client. The intake is followed by a number of counseling sessions of, on average, one to two hours, in which clients engage in self-assessment, opportunity assessment, career decision making, and planning exercises. Sessions are holistic in nature—that is, clients discuss their career issues in relation to other life issues with their counselor.

Procedure

Data were collected in 2006-2007 with Flemish employees enrolled for career counseling at a qualified external career center. These data have been used in two earlier studies (Verbruggen & Sels, 2008, 2010), without the current study duplicating prior findings. We contacted all external and subsidized career services active in 2005. Twelve of the fourteen career centers, representing 92% of all Flemish adult career counseling clients at the time of data collection, agreed to participate. We collected data at the start of the first counseling session (T1; $N = 533$), at the end of the last counseling session (T2; $N = 230$) and six months after the end of the last counseling session (T3; $N = 205$). Because the drop in respondents between T1 and T2

was rather substantial, we examined it in more detail. We contacted all dropouts at T2 and reached 80% of them. The majority (41%) reported that their counselor had not given them a second questionnaire. Furthermore, 19% had not yet finished the counseling trajectory, another 19% had received the second questionnaire but had not responded to it ("true dropouts"), 11% claimed to have returned the second questionnaire ("lost in the mail"), and the remaining 10% did not remember whether they had received the second questionnaire.

All clients in our sample were employed at the start of the counseling. They received at least 3 and at most 13 counseling sessions (the intake interview not included), with on average of 6 sessions. The total hours of counseling ranged from 5 to 25 hours, with an average of 9 hours. Most sessions lasted between one and two hours.

We tested hypothesis 1 with respondents who participated in wave 1 and wave 2 and who had valid responses on all key variables (N = 188). The majority of these respondents were female (72%). Their average age was 37 years (SD = 8 years), with 46% of the respondents between 20 and 35 years, 37% between 35 and 44, and 17% of 45 years or older. Twenty two percent had at most a high school degree, 39% had a Bachelor degree, and 39% a Master degree.

Hypotheses 2 and 3 were tested with the respondents who participated in all three waves and had valid responses on all relevant variables (N = 160). The majority of these respondents were female (67%). The average age was 36 years (SD = 8 years), with 46% of the respondents between 20 and 35 years, 38% between 35 and 44, and 16.0% of 45 years or older. Eighteen percent had at most a high school degree, 39% had a Bachelor degree, and 42% a Master degree.

We conducted dropout analyses to examine whether the respondents included in our analyses differed significantly from the non-included respondents in terms of gender, age, level of education, or on other T1 variables included in this study. The results of these analyses

showed no significant relationship between the included and the non-included respondents on any of these variables. This suggests a random dropout pattern and thus a low risk of biased results due to attrition.

Measures for Testing Hypotheses 1

Career counseling goals. Career counseling goals were assessed at T1 by asking the respondents to which extent they aspired to six potential career counseling goals. In particular, we let them evaluate the following six statements on a five-point Likert scale (1 = totally disagree; 5 = totally agree): "I expect through career counseling (1) to increase awareness of my strengths and competences; (2) to better understand my chances on the external labor market; (3) to be able to decide what to do in my career; (4) to find a new job; (5) to be better able to balance my work and private life and (6) to improve my work relations". We thus offered the respondents a predefined set of six potential goals and let them evaluate all six of them. This is one of the main ways used in the literature to assess people's personal goals (e.g., Roberts-Gray, Steinfeld & Bailey, 1999; Ryan, Chirkov, Little, Sheldon, Timoshina, & Deci, 1999). The use of the words "I expect to" is in line with earlier research, which has argued that people's personal goals can be reliably assessed by measuring which outcomes people expect to realize (Locke & Bryan, 1968; Zimmerman, Bandura & Martinez-Pons, 1992).

The predefined list of six potential career counseling goals was based on career counseling outcomes and goals mentioned in research on career counseling with adults (e.g., Bernaud et al., 2006; Bimrose et al., 2004; Healy, 2001). We checked the face validity of these goals by discussing the list with career counselors from the twelve participating centers (in twelve interviews, one per center). The counselors confirmed the relevance of all included goals and especially of those goals that related specifically to adult career issues (i.e., "finding a new

job", "improving work-family balance" and "improving work relationships").

We examined the content validity of each goal item by checking the correlations with the corresponding room for improvement variable (see below) using T1 data (N = 421). We expected significant but moderate correlations, since each goal and corresponding room for improvement variable related to the same content domain (e.g., self-awareness) but concerned a different type of variable (i.e., goal versus room for improvement). Results of the correlation analysis confirmed this expectation. That is, each of the six career counseling goals correlated significantly ($p < .05$) with its corresponding room for improvement variable, with effect sizes ranging from small to medium: improving self-awareness (r = -.26), improving opportunity awareness (r = -.15), making a career decision (r = -.13), finding a new job (r = .41), improving work-family balance (r = .40), and improving work relationships (r = .30).

Specific outcome attainment. In line with Tinsley and colleagues (2002), we assessed specific outcome attainment by asking the respondents to what extent they had attained a list of specific outcomes through career counseling. In particular, we asked the respondents at T2 to indicate the extent to which career counseling had helped them attain each of the six potential career counseling outcomes they had evaluated in the goal statements at T1. Respondents were thus asked to evaluate the following six items on a five-point Likert scale (1 = totally disagree; 5 = totally agree): "Thanks to the career counseling, I (1) increased awareness of my strengths and competences; (2) improved awareness of my chances on the external labor market; (3) have decided what to do in my career; (4) found a new job; (5) improved my work-family balance and (6) improved my work relations".

Control variables. We controlled for clients' room for improvement on each of the six potential career counseling outcomes. For each of these outcomes, we identified a construct

which captures the possible room for improvement on this outcome dimension and measured it at T1. First, self-awareness (6 items, e.g., “I am aware of my strengths”, α = .74, Verbruggen & Sels, 2008) was used to capture the room for realizing the first outcome (i.e., to increase awareness of one’s strengths and competences, with lower levels of self-awareness implying more room for realizing this outcome). Second, we used opportunity awareness (6 items, e.g., “I am well aware of organizations where I could work”, α = .81) as an indicator of the room for realizing the second outcome (i.e., to better understand one’s chances on the external labor market, with low opportunity awareness being an indication of more room for realizing this outcome). This self-developed measure was based on existing measures of occupational knowledge (e.g. Wanberg & Muchinsky, 1992) and on input obtained through the interviews with the career counselors of the twelve participating career centers. Third, goal clarity (6 items, e.g. “I have clear career goals”, α = .78, Creed, Patton & Bartrum, 2002) was used to capture the room for realizing the third outcome (i.e., to be able to decide what to do in one’s career, with low levels indicating more room for realizing this outcome). Fourth, turnover intentions (3 items, e.g., “I often think about leaving this organization”, α = .87, Jiang & Klein, 2002) were used to assess the room for realizing the fourth outcome (i.e., to find a new job, with higher turnover intentions indicating more room for realizing this outcome). Fifth, the room for improving balance between work and private life was captured by work-family conflict (4 items, e.g., “After work, I come home too tired to do the things I would like to do” (Gutek, Searle & Klepa, 1991), with high conflict indicating more room for realizing this outcome. Sixth, room to improve one’s work relationship was assessed with a 4-item scale (Van Veldhoven & Meijman, 1994) assessing bad work relationships (e.g., “How often do unpleasant situations arise between you and your colleagues?”, α = .69), with high scores on this variable indicating more room for

realizing this outcome.

In addition, we controlled for three demographics assessed at T1: gender (1: female, 0: male), age and having children living at home (1: yes; 0: no), and for two counseling characteristics assessed at T2 (number of counseling sessions and total hours of counseling received).

Measures for Testing Hypotheses 2 and 3

Goal Attainment. In line with earlier research (e.g., Verbruggen & Sels, 2010), we calculated clients' goal attainment by taking the mean of the outcome attainment items for those outcomes that matched clients' initial (T1) goals. To be able to do so, we had to determine which outcomes could be considered as a goal of a client. We decided to consider an outcome as a goal when the respondent had given a score of four ("agree") or five ("totally agree") on that goal item. For instance, when a respondent had agreed (i.e., score of 4) or totally agreed (i.e., score of 5) with the item "I expect through career counseling to increase awareness of my strengths and competences", then we considered "increased self-awareness" as a career counseling goal of this respondent. The number of career counseling goals among our respondents ranged between 1 and 5, with 4% of the respondents reporting one goal, 17% reporting two goals, 28% reporting three goals, 30% reporting four goals and 21% reporting five goals. Goal attainment was then calculated by summing the attainment scores for all initial goals and then dividing this sum by the number of goals.

Non-Goal Attainment. Non-goal attainment—the degree to which clients attained outcomes other than their initial goals—was calculated by taking the mean of the specific outcome attainment scores for those outcomes that were not rated as career counseling goals (i.e., where a given outcome was given a rating of 3 or less) at T1.

Career satisfaction. We measured career satisfaction at T3 with the three-item career satisfaction scale of Martins, Eddleston, and Veiga (2002). Respondents had to indicate on a 5-point scale (1 = totally disagree; 5 = totally agree) whether (1) in general, they were satisfied with their career status, (2) in general, they were satisfied with their present labor market situation, and (3) they felt that their career progress was satisfactory. Earlier research using this measure (e.g., De Vos & Soens, 2008; Lu, Siu, Spector & Shi, 2009) has found the scale to be reliable (i.e., Cronbach alpha ranging between .79 and .93) and to correlate significantly in the theoretically expected direction with career insight, career self-management, job satisfaction, life satisfaction, and organizational commitment. In this study, we found a Cronbach alpha of .79.

Life satisfaction. In line with Lucas and Donnellan (2007), life satisfaction at T3 was assessed by asking respondents to indicate their overall level of life satisfaction on an 11-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (completely dissatisfied) to 10 (completely satisfied). Cheung and Lucas (2014) found that this single-item measure correlated substantially ($r > .60$) with the well-established multiple-item Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS; Diener et al., 1985) and showed similar correlation patterns as the SWLS with theoretically relevant variables, supporting the validity of this single-item measure.

Control variables. We controlled for gender, age, having children living at home, and number of career counseling goals, all assessed at T1, and for number of counseling sessions and total hours of counseling received, as assessed at T2. In addition, we controlled for the baseline levels of career satisfaction at T1 in the regression to explain career satisfaction at T3 and for baseline levels of career and life satisfaction at T1 in the regression to explain life satisfaction at T3. In that way, the regression coefficients of the other explanatory variables capture the relation of these variables to life and career satisfaction over and above baseline satisfaction scores. We

assessed career and life satisfaction at T1 using the same instruments as at T3.

Results

Relationship between Career Counseling Goals and Specific Outcome Attainment

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics and correlations among the six potential career counseling goals and the six corresponding outcome attainment items. As shown in Table 1, clients most strongly aspired to increase their self-awareness (M = 4.47; SD = 0.85), to make a career decision (M = 4.43; SD = 0.77), and to increase their opportunity awareness (M = 3.82; SD = 0.98) through career counseling. Clients reported highest attainment scores on these same outcomes: increased self-awareness (M = 4.13; SD = 0.86), having made a career decision (M = 3.97; SD = 0.93), and enhanced opportunity awareness (M = 3.39; SD = 1.07). The means on the other outcomes were below the midpoint of three, suggesting that the average respondent had not attained these outcomes via career counseling. Table 1 further shows that each goal item at T1 correlated positively with the corresponding outcome attainment score at T2. Thus, clients who more strongly aspired to attain a specific outcome at T1 reported on average a higher attainment score on that outcome at T2. In addition, most outcome attainment scores were correlated positively with each other, suggesting that respondents with higher attainment scores on one outcome were likely to have higher attainment scores on other outcomes as well.

<INSERT TABLE 1 HERE>

To test hypothesis 1, we conducted six hierarchical multiple regressions, one for each specific outcome attainment item. In the first step, we entered the control variables, including the room for improvement on that specific outcome dimension, and in the second step, we included the corresponding career counseling goal. In five of the six regressions, the career counseling goal was correlated significantly with—and explained unique variance in—the corresponding

outcome attainment item. In particular, clients who more strongly aspired to increase their self-awareness via career counseling reported higher scores on the outcome "increased self-awareness" ($\beta = .22$, $p < .01$, $\Delta R^2 = .04$); clients who more strongly aspired to increase their opportunity awareness via career counseling reported higher scores on the outcome "increased opportunity awareness" ($\beta = .29$, $p < .01$, $\Delta R^2 = .08$); clients who more strongly aspired to make a career decision via career counseling reported higher scores on the outcome "made a career decision" ($\beta = .24$, $p < .01$, $\Delta R^2 = .06$); clients who more strongly aspired to improve their work-family balance via career counseling reported higher scores on the outcome "improved work-family balance" ($\beta = .50$, $p < .01$, $\Delta R^2 = .19$); and clients who more strongly aspired to improve their work relationships reported higher scores on the outcome "improved work relationships" ($\beta = .33$, $p < .01$, $\Delta R^2 = .10$). Only the goal "I expect through career counseling to find a new job" ($\beta = .12$, $p = .17$) was not correlated significantly with the corresponding outcome attainment item (i.e., "Thanks to career counseling, I have found a new job").

Relationship between Goal and Non-Goal Attainment and Career and Life Satisfaction

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics and correlations among respondents' goal attainment, non-goal attainment, career satisfaction, and life satisfaction. Note that the mean for goal attainment ($M = 3.60$, $SD = 0.78$) is higher than the mean for non-goal attainment ($M = 2.64$; $SD = 1.04$), which supports our earlier finding that clients are more likely to attain outcomes that match their initial goals than to attain outcomes that do not match their initial goals. However, both goal attainment and non-goal attainment scores spanned the full range between 1 and 5, indicating that clients to some extent also attained outcomes that did not match their initial career counseling goals.

<INSERT TABLE 2 HERE.>

To test hypotheses 2 and 3, we performed two hierarchical regressions, one for career satisfaction at T3 and one for life satisfaction at T3 (see Table 3). In line with hypothesis 2, clients' goal attainment was related significantly and positively to clients' career satisfaction at T3, whereas no significant relationship was found with clients' non-goal attainment. Next, in line with hypothesis 3, we see a significant positive relationship between clients' goal attainment—but not their non-goal attainment—and clients' life satisfaction at T3 in step two of the hierarchical regression. Yet, the relationship between goal attainment and life satisfaction at T3 disappeared in step three of the regression, that is, when career satisfaction at T3 was included. This suggests that, as hypothesized and in line with the social cognitive model of work well-being (Lent & Brown, 2006), the relationship between goal attainment and life satisfaction at T3 is fully mediated by career satisfaction at T3. An indirect effect test using bias-corrected bootstrapping with 5000 bootstrap samples (Hayes & Preacher, 2014) confirmed the significant indirect effect of goal attainment on life satisfaction via career satisfaction ($\beta = .41$, $SE = .14$).

<INSERT TABLE 3 HERE.>

Discussion

The main aim of the present study was to challenge the uniformity myth in career counseling outcome studies—in particular, the assumption that the same outcomes are equally beneficial for all clients. Inspired by SCCT's interest, choice, performance (Lent et al., 1994) and work well-being models (Lent & Brown, 2006; 2008), we hypothesized that clients' initial career counseling goals form an important individual difference in understanding differential career counseling effectiveness. We posited that clients' goals would affect both the outcomes clients were likely to attain through career counseling and the outcomes from which they would most benefit (in terms of increased well-being).

Our results largely confirmed these hypotheses. First, five of the six initial career counseling goals included in our study were found to relate to the corresponding outcome attainment score. This supports our assumption that clients are more likely to attain career counseling outcomes that match their initial goals and less likely to attain other possible career counseling outcomes. Only the goal "finding a job" was not significantly related to its corresponding outcome attainment score. The likely explanation is that career counseling does not impact this outcome directly (Amundson, 1995). Indeed, although career counseling can help clients become more aware of their motivations and job options and to improve the quality of their resume and their job interview skills, whether or not clients actually find a new job depends largely on extra-counseling considerations, such as labor market conditions and engagement in job search behaviors. Expecting to find a new job through career counseling may therefore be less realistic than other potential career counseling goals. Second, as hypothesized, goal attainment, but not non-goal attainment, related significantly to clients' subsequent career and life satisfaction. That is, only the attainment of outcomes that match clients' initial goals, and not the attainment of other outcomes, was found to relate to their subsequent well-being. This finding thus supports our expectation that not all career counseling outcomes contribute equally to a client's well-being.

These findings have implications for career counseling outcome studies, in particular for the way these studies conceptualize the role of individual differences. Most career counseling outcome studies that include individual differences examine their moderating role, thereby hypothesizing that the same outcomes are valuable for everybody, but that certain individual characteristics are likely to result in lower levels of these outcomes. Yet, our findings suggest that not all outcomes are equally beneficial to all clients. Indeed, we found that when clients did

not aspire to attain certain outcomes as a goal of career counseling, attaining these outcomes did not predict improved well-being. Conversely, not realizing certain outcomes may not harm clients' well-being if these clients did not aspire to attain these outcomes in the first place. Researchers may therefore want to consider the use of fully individualized outcome criteria based on clients' initial goals, as has first been suggested long ago (Oliver, 1979; Watts & Kidd, 1978). More generally, this calls for a reflection on what career counseling effectiveness actually entails and how we should assess it.

This study has implications for practice as well. First, the insight that people come to career counseling with a variety of goals could be useful to reach out to the large majority of individuals who may benefit from career counseling but who do not seek such services (Vogel, Wester, Wei, & Boysen, 2005). That is, knowledge of the variety of possible career counseling goals can be used to inform potential clients about what career counseling can do and, in that way, help people feel more comfortable about seeking this service. Second, since goal attainment but not non-goal attainment was found to relate to clients' subsequent well-being, it seems important for career counselors to examine—at an early stage of counseling—whether clients' goals are realistic. If clients have unrealistic goals, these goals are less likely to be attained, which could be detrimental to clients' subsequent well-being. Third, given the importance of goal attainment for clients' subsequent well-being, career counselors need to be open to a wide variety of career counseling goals and should consider adapting, if possible, treatment to the specific goals of the client. As our study suggests, this seems to be an important condition to help clients attain improved well-being—which is, after all, an important overall aim of career counseling (Lent & Brown, 2008; Verbruggen & Sels, 2010).

Finally, the limitations of this study must be considered. First, we assessed clients' career

counseling goals by letting clients assess a predefined set of six potential career counseling goals. However, clients could have had career counseling goals other than the predefined ones. Future research may want to explore other ways for assessing clients' goals, for instance, by letting clients freely list the goals they expect to realize through career counseling (Donnelly & Carswell, 2002; Oliver, 1979). Such "free" goal assessments could shed light on the broad range of goals clients bring with them to career counseling and could be used for more individualized counseling evaluations (Oliver, 1979). Second, we used single-item measures to assess clients' career counseling goals and specific outcome attainment. Although we performed checks of the face and content validity of these items, future research should preferably use multiple-item scales and validate them more thoroughly. Third, we focused on clients' initial career counseling goals. Clients' goals may however shift over the course of the intervention (Amundson, 1995), for instance, because initial goals turn out to be unrealistic or because clients gain a better understanding of their career priorities. Future research should therefore explore how goals change during the counseling and whether such changes are important for evaluating career counseling effectiveness. Finally, it would be useful for career counseling outcome studies to examine the role of goals with a diverse set of clients (e.g., high school students, graduates, unemployed people, employees). The present study was limited to adult employed clients, whereas other client groups may have other career counseling goals that differ in content or feasibility.

In sum, this study examined the role of clients' initial career counseling goals for understanding career counseling effectiveness. In line with SCCT's interest, choice, and performance models (Lent et al., 1994), we expected clients' initial goals to affect the outcomes clients were likely to attain through career counseling. In line with SCCT's work well-being

model (Lent & Brown, 2006; 2008), we assumed that goal attainment—but not non-goal attainment—would predict clients' subsequent career and life satisfaction. We found support for both assumptions. This supports the relevance of using social cognitive models in career counseling outcome studies (cf. Verbruggen & Sels, 2010), a finding which we hope may stimulate other researchers to further explore the relevance of SCCT to the context of career counseling.

References

Abele, A. E., & Spurk, D. (2009). How do objective and subjective career success interrelate over time? *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 82, 803-824.

Amundson, N. E. (1995). Action planning through the phases of counseling. *Journal of Employment Counseling*, 32, 147-153.

Bernaud, J. L., Gaudron, J. P., & Lemoine, C. (2006). Effects of career counseling on French adults: An experimental study. *The Career Development Quarterly*, 54, 242-255.

Bimrose, J., Barnes, S. A., Hughes, D., & Orton, M. (2004). *What is effective guidance?: evidence from longitudinal case studies in England*. University of Warwick.

Brown, S. D. & Ryan Krane, N. (2000). Four (or five) sessions and a cloud of dust: Old assumptions and new observations about career counseling. In S. Brown & R. Lent (Eds.), Handbook of Counseling Psychology (3rd ed., pp. 740-766). New York: Wiley.

Brown, S. D. & McPartland, E. B. (2005). Career interventions: Current status and future directions. In W. B. Walsh & M. L. Savickas (Eds.), *Handbook of vocational psychology: Theory, research, and practice* (3rd ed., pp. 195-226). Mahaw, NJ: Erlbaum.

Cheung, F., & Lucas, R. E. (2014). Assessing the validity of single-item life satisfaction measures: Results from three large samples. *Quality of Life Research*, 23, 2809-2818.

Creed, P., Patton, W., Bartrum, D. (2002). Multidimensional properties of the LOT_R. Effects of Optimism and Pessimism on career and well-being related variables in adolescents. *Journal of Career Assessment*, 10, 42-61.

De Vos, A., & Soens, N. (2008). Protean attitude and career success: The mediating role of self-management. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 73, 449-456.

Diener, E. D., Emmons, R. A., Larsen, R. J., & Griffin, S. (1985). The satisfaction with life scale. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 49, 71-75.

Donnelly, C., & Carswell, A. (2002). Individualized outcome measures: a review of the literature. *Canadian Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 69(2), 84-94.

Galassi, J., Crace, R., Martin, G., James, R., Wallace, R. (1992). Client preferences and anticipations in career counseling. A preliminary investigation. *Journal of Counseling Psychology,* 38, 46-55.

Gutek, B., Searle, S., Klepa, L. (1991). Rational versus gender role explanations for work-family conflict. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 76, 560-568.

Hayes, A. F., & Preacher, K. J. (2014). Statistical mediation analysis with a multicategorical independent variable. *British Journal of Mathematical and Statistical Psychology*, 67, 451-470.

Healy, C. (2001). A follow-up of adult career counseling clients of a university extension center. *Career Development Quarterly*, 49, 363-373.

Heppner, M. J., & Heppner, P. P. (2003). Identifying process variables in career counseling: A research agenda. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 62, 429-452.

Heppner, M. J., Lee, D. G., Heppner, P. P., McKinnon, L. C., Multon, K. D., & Gysbers, N. C. (2004). The role of problem-solving appraisal in the process and outcome of career counseling. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 65, 217-238.

Herr, E. L. (1997). Career counselling: A process in process. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 25, 81-93.

Heslin, P. A. (2005). Conceptualizing and evaluating career success. *Journal of Organizational behavior*, 26, 113-136.

Irving, P. G., & Montes, S. D. (2009). Met expectations: The effects of expected and delivered inducements on employee satisfaction. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 82, 431-451.

Janeiro, I. N., Mota, L. P., & Ribas, A. M. (2014). Effects of two types of career interventions on students with different career coping styles. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 85, 115-124.

Jiang, J. J., & Klein, G. (2002). A discrepancy model of information system personnel turnover. *Journal of Management Information Systems*, 19, 249-272.

Kidd, J., Jackson, C., & Hirsch, W. (2003). The outcomes of effective career discussion at work. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 62, 119-133.

Lent, R. W., & Brown, S. (2006). Integrating person and situation perspective on work satisfaction: A social-cognitive view. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 69, 236-247.

Lent, R. W., & Brown, S. (2008). Social cognitive career theory and subjective well-being in the context of work. *Journal of Career Assessment*, 16, 6-21.

Lent, R. W., Brown, S., & Hackett, G. (1994). Toward a unifying social cognitive theory of career and academic interest, choice and performance. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 45, 79-122.

Locke, E.A., & Bryan, J. (1968). Grade goals as determinants of academic achievement. *Journal of General Psychology*, 79, 217-228.

Lounsbury, J. W., Loveland, J. M., Sundstrom, E. D., Gibson, L. W., Drost, A. W., & Hamrick, F. L. (2003). An investigation of personality traits in relation to career satisfaction. *Journal of Career Assessment*, 11, 287-307.

Lu, J. F., Siu, O. L., Spector, P. E., & Shi, K. (2009). Antecedents and outcomes of a fourfold taxonomy of work-family balance in Chinese employed parents. *Journal of Occupational*

Health Psychology, 14, 182-192.

Lucas, R., & Donnellan, M. (2007). How stable is happiness? Using the STARTS model to estimate the stability of life satisfaction. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 41, 1091-1098.

Martins, L., Eddleston, K., Veiga, J. (2002). Moderators of the relationship between work-family conflict and career satisfaction. *Academy of Management Journal*, 45, 399-409.

Oliver, L. W. (1979). Outcome measurement in career counseling research. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 26, 217.

Roberts-Gray, C., Steinfeld, S., & Bailey, W. (1999). Goal setting and progress evaluation in youth empowerment programs. *Evaluation and Program Planning*, 22, 21-30.

Ryan, R. M., Chirkov, V. I., Little, T. D., Sheldon, K. M., Timoshina, E., & Deci, E. L. (1999). The American dream in Russia: Extrinsic aspirations and well-being in two cultures. *Personality and social psychology bulletin*, 25, 1509-1524.

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2001). On happiness and human potentials: A review of research on hedonic and eudaimonic well-being. *Annual review of psychology*, 52, 141-166.

Tinsley, H.E.A., & Tokar, D.M. (1994),Client expectations about counseling and involvement during career counseling. *Career Development Quarterly*, 42, 326-336.

Tinsley, H. E., Tinsley, D. J., & Rushing, J. (2002). Psychological type, decision-making style, and reactions to structured career interventions. *Journal of Career Assessment*, 10, 258-280.

Van Veldhoven, M., Meijman, T. (1994). *Het meten van psychosociale arbeidsbelasting met een vragenlijst*. Amsterdam: NIA, pp. 126.

Verbruggen, M., & Sels. L. (2008). Can career self-directedness be improved through

counseling? *Journal of vocational behavior*, 73, 318-327.

Verbruggen, M., & Sels, L. (2010). Social-Cognitive factors affecting clients' career and life satisfaction after counseling. *Journal of Career Assessment*, 18, 3-15.

Verbruggen, M., Dries, N., van Vianen, A. (2013). The counseling needs of employed adults: Implication for career counseling. In: Maree K., Di Fabio A. (Eds.), *Psychology of career counseling: new challenges for a new era* (pp. 101-116). New York (USA): Nova Sciences Publishers.

Vogel, D., Wester, S., Wei, M., Boysen, G. (2005). The role of outcome expectations and attitutes on the decision to seek professional help. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 52, 459-470.

Wanberg, C., & Muchinsky, P. (1992). A typology of career decision status: Validity extension of the vocational decision status model. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 39, 71-80.

Watts, A. G., & Kidd, J. M. (1978). Evaluating the effectiveness of careers guidance: A review of the British research. *Journal of Occupational Psychology*, 51, 235-248.

Whiston, S., Sexton, T., & Lasoff, D. (1998). Career-intervention outcome: A replication and extension of Oliver and Spokane (1988). *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 45, 150-165.

Zimmerman, B. J., Bandura, A., & Martinez-Pons, M. (1992). Self-motivation for academic attainment: The role of self-efficacy beliefs and personal goal setting. *American Educational Research Journal*, 29, 663-676.

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations among Potential Career Counseling Goals (T1) and Specific Outcome Attainment (T2)

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Goal: increasing self-awareness T1	4.47	0.85	-										
2. Goal: increasing opportunity awareness T1	3.82	0.98	.23**	-									
3. Goal: making a career decision T1	4.43	0.77	.23**	.14	-								
4. Goal: finding a new job T1	3.48	1.14	.12	.50**	.15*	-							
5. Goal: improving work-family balance T1	3.12	1.37	.10	.03	.12	.09	-						
6. Goal: improving work relationships T1	2.62	1.23	.16*	.07	.15*	.01	.31**	-					
7. Outcome: increased self-awareness T2	4.13	0.86	.18*	.09	.13	.01	.12	.03	-				
8. Outcome: increased opportunity awareness T2	3.39	1.07	.05	.24**	.08	.31**	.09	-.06	.27**	-			
9. Outcome: having made a career decision T2	3.87	0.93	.03	.06	.21**	.03	.11	.03	.46**	.30**	-		
10. Outcome: found a new job T2	2.04	1.37	.10	.16*	.05	.25**	.09	.03	.19*	.41**	.36**	-	
11. Outcome: improved work-family balance T2	2.74	1.25	.09	.03	.16*	-.00	.49**	.06	.31**	.20**	.37**	.33**	
12. Outcome: improved work relationships T2	2.93	1.19	.16*	.03	.21**	-.04	.27**	.36**	.26**	.09	.22**	.23**	.62**

Note. $N = 188$.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$

Table 2

Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations Among Goal Attainment, Non-goal Attainment, Career Satisfaction and Life Satisfaction

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4
1. Goal attainment T2	3.60	0.78	-			
2. Non-goal attainment T2	2.64	1.04	.30**	-		
3. Career satisfaction T3	3.45	0.97	.29**	.14	-	
4. Life satisfaction T3	7.69	1.31	.20**	.18*	.43*	-

Note. $N = 160$

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$

Table 3

Results of the Hierarchical Regressions Explaining Career and Life Satisfaction at T3

Dependent variable	Step	Explanatory variable	β	SE	R^2	R^2 change
Career satisfaction T3	1	Control variables[a]			.14**	.14**
	2	Control variables[a]			.21**	.07**
		Goal attainment	0.25**	0.10		
		Non-goal attainment	0.05	0.07		
Life satisfaction T3	1	Control variables[b]			.08	.08
	2	Control variables[b]			.15**	.07**
		Goal attainment T2	0.27**	0.18		
		Non-goal attainment T2	-0.02	0.14		
	3	Control variables[b]			.62**	.47**
		Goal attainment T2	0.08	0.13		
		Non-goal attainment T2	-0.07	0.09		
		Career satisfaction T3	0.77**	.11		

Note. N =160. [a] Control variables included were: gender (1: female, 0: male), age, having children (1: yes, 0: no), number of counseling sessions, number of counseling hours, number of goals, and career satisfaction at T1. [b] Control variables included were: gender (1: female, 0: male), age, having children (1: yes, 0: no), number of counseling sessions, number of counseling hours, number of goals, career satisfaction at T1, and life satisfaction at T1.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.